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Engler seeks federal disaster rating for western U.P. floods

By John Flesher / Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY -- Gov. John Engler has asked President Bush to declare the western Upper Peninsula a disaster area because of severe flooding in April.

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"Public damage from flooding in the western Upper Peninsula exceeds \$10 million," the governor said. "A federal disaster declaration would bring additional, much-needed aid to people afflicted by this disaster."

Engler declared a state of disaster April 16 for Gogebic County and the city of Ironwood. On Tuesday, he enlarged the area to include Baraga, Houghton, Marquette and Ontonagon counties.

Other counties may be added to the list soon, Engler said.

Dickinson and Iron counties had some flooding, and a state Department of Natural Resources fish barrier project on the Paint River in Iron County was destroyed.

Engler's declaration authorizes the Michigan State Police's Emergency Management Division to work with local agencies in providing relief.

Some of the worst flooding in a century struck the region in mid-April, caused by record-high temperatures that caused rapid melting of the winter snowpack. Numerous roads and bridges were closed and several dams breached.

Gogebic County was hardest hit. A state police report said 166 homes and 18 businesses there were damaged or destroyed. Some 75 people were temporarily unemployed.

In the village of Wakefield, 80 homes were damaged and 33 destroyed.

Most displaced residents are back in their homes.

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